

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Sam Couvillon, Barbara Brooks, Zack Thompson, Juli Hayes, Danny Dunagan

VACANT POSITION: Ward 4

STAFF PRESENT: Bryan Lackey, Angela Sheppard, Jeremy Perry, Chris Rotalsky, Robyn Lynch, Linda MacGregor, Rusty Ligon, Myron Bennett, Tracy Robar, Amy Bennet, Chris Hamilton, Denise Jordan

Mayor Sam Couvillon called the meeting to order at 9:16 AM.

### **PUBLIC WORKS**

Public Works Director Chris Rotalsky began the presentation with a T-SPLOST discussion indicating this information was presented in the past. He shared the following details and displayed the anticipated activities from January 2024 to March 31, 2031:

- Allows a 1% tax with an intergovernmental agreement executed by the county and all municipalities or a .75% tax without an intergovernmental agreement (more complex approach).
- A referendum question is required.
- This is a five-year tax.

The categories of priority include intersection improvements, sidewalks, construction/extension/realignment, study/plan/design and GDOT projects. There was discussion about the volume of vehicles traveling through the community impacting connectivity and navigation. The following projects were briefly discussed:

- Park Hill Connectivity
  - Riverside / Park Hill at Oak Tree Drive
  - Park Hill / South Enota
- Riverside / Morningside/Park Hill Corridor
- Park Hill / Enota
- East / West Connectivity
- Ridge Connector
- Downey Boulevard Extension
- Hilton Connector

Discretionary projects included Memorial Park Drive / Old Flowery Branch Road Intersection, pedestrian improvements and several study projects. The last revenue projections anticipated \$325 million in collections with 80% being allocated to large projects and the remaining funds allocated to each jurisdiction based on the population distribution method. Gainesville's anticipated jurisdictional share is \$19,490,609. If the bill clears, there will be a November 5, 2024 referendum with collections beginning April 1, 2025 and ending March 31, 2030 or March 31, 2031 depending on passage of the bill.

### **Council Comments**

- *Council Member Hayes inquired about the deadline for spending the funds and commented on T-SPLOST Marketing.*

**AIRPORT**

Public Works Director Chris Rotalsky commented on the airport being a great economic tool and discussed proposed improvements. Using the One Georgia Grant to extend the runway by 500 feet creates additional take-off and landing distance. This allows jets to hold more fuel and ultimately fly farther distances which is a big deal to the aviation community.

Mr. Rotalsky presented a diagram for closing the secondary runway to provide corporate hangars. This is a great economic driver and there has been some interest in making this change. If desired, the runway extension and closing the second runway will happen simultaneously. The runway extension cost is estimated between \$2 and \$3 million. The closing of the second runway is not expected to be that expensive. The cost of a new terminal is estimated to be between \$7 and \$8 million. A letter of intent is on file from one company for a hangar.

**COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Planning and Appeals Board (PAB)**

Community and Economic Development Director Rusty Ligon shared general information about the board, i.e., 7 members appointed for 2-year terms. They serve as the recommending body to the governmental entity and have the final say on variances. Members are required to complete mandatory training within one year of appointment. He reviewed the existing membership list noting three terms have expired, there is one vacant position and one person wants to transition off the board. He felt this was a good time to consider and possibly implement changes.

Mr. Ligon shared data gathered from Alpharetta, Buford, Dunwoody, Milton, Snellville, Gwinnett County and Hall County in regards to payment. He proposed the following pay structure:

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>AMOUNT</b>
Attend PAB Meeting	\$150
Visit Application Site	\$150
Meet with Applicant/Developer	\$150
Attend Neighborhood Meeting	\$150
Complete PAB Training	\$150
<b>Total Potential Payment</b>	<b>\$750</b>

**Council Comments**

- *Council Member Hayes asked if there would be a maximum pay.*
- *Council Member Dunagan felt it would difficult to track visiting the application site.*
- *Council Member Thompson asked if an optional work session would be beneficial for the PAB.*
- *Mayor Couvillon felt this proposal engaged members to be better prepared. He was concerned about having quality individuals serving in this role and was reluctant to make too many changes at one time. He offered for the school board to appoint a member. He suggested determining the changes by June 1.*
- *Council Member Brooks stated she will be looking at the Ward 3 representative on the premise of seeking more involvement.*

### **Tax Allocation District (TAD) Projects**

The next TAD meeting is coming up soon. Staff stopped accepting applications for the midtown area in December and received six applications before the deadline. The following projects will come forward:

- (1) 896 Main Street: a new 43,000 square foot building for warehouse, residential and retail;
- (2) 104 Main Street: building renovation for a 13,700 square foot two-story restaurant; and
- (3) 108 Washington Street: building renovation for 9,800 square foot of retail on the first floor and residential on the second floor with alleyway improvements behind the building.

### Council Comments

- *Council Member Hayes asked if there was an opportunity to supplement alley projects with public art funds.*

### **CVB/MAIN STREET SPORTS ALLIANCE**

Tourism Director Robyn Lynch described Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) as self-taxing districts created by a petition supported by 51% of the municipal taxpayers of the district or municipal taxpayers owning at least 51% of the taxable property in the district. The funds can be used for security, advertising, events and programming. Other communities use it for sanitation and security. Consideration was given to the Main Street district being in Midland from the parking deck to Jekyll Brewery. This involves 245 tax exempt properties, leaving 150 taxable properties and 295 business licenses. A fee could be added to business licenses. The city is already investing \$272,665 excluding parks and recreation. The Main Street Program estimates losing \$49,862 if a BID is implemented. The potential BID Program Revenue is \$119,041. The BID Board controls the money. The top 10 property stakeholders were identified. A champion would be needed to promote the BID which most likely would be one of the top property stakeholders.

Ms. Lynch stated BIDs are most successful in blighted areas and didn't think this was the right way to proceed.

### Council Comments

- *Council Member Hayes asked if an additional \$70,000 was worth upsetting the top 10 stakeholders.*
- *Council Member Dunagan suggested increasing the Main Street Program Membership fee.*
- *Council Member Thompson inquired about adding a service fee onto sales or an additional small sales tax so visitors are paying the fee and not the property owners.*
- *Upon inquiry, it was noted 70 businesses are Main Street Members.*
- *Assistant City Manager Sheppard suggested making Main Street Membership mandatory for all businesses in the district because they receive additional services.*
- *City Manager Lackey suggested evaluating options through LOST.*
- *Mayor Couvillon inquired about handicap parking spaces in the North Deck suggesting some handicap parking be moved to Bradford.*

### **Trolley Services**

Tourism Director Robyn Lynch reported people love the trolley and shared statistics for 2022 and 2023. Ridership went down in 2023 because the routes were extended to other areas and it took longer. Since the trolleys were so busy, they transitioned to shuttle buses for transportation. Two school buses were purchased to use for shuttle services. The first bus was finished yesterday with city branding.

### **New Hotel Developments**

Tourism Director Robyn Lynch displayed a diagram showing four proposed hotel developments in the next two years. Existing hotels were also identified.

### **Thompson Bridge Park**

Tourism Director Robyn Lynch met with the Corp of Engineers regarding the master plan. Approval is an 18-month process. She displayed a diagram of the features. She anticipated receiving approval in 2024/2025 and construction was anticipated to begin in 2025/2026.

### **Holly Park**

Tourism Director Robyn Lynch stated Parks and Recreation is working with the Corp of Engineers. She presented a master plan that included a hotel onsite. The Corp was not supportive. They approved cottages/tiny houses for rentals instead. They also approved a restaurant, parking, pavilions and a courtesy dock. This is a 3 to 5 year project when considering the approval process.

### Council Comments

- *Council Member Brooks requested accommodations for a public fishing pier.*

### **Green Street Park**

Tourism Director Robyn Lynch commented on community meetings occurring over the last 1.5 years to gather ideas. Features include a catering kitchen, outdoor covered seating, food truck parking, a covered stage, dedicated golf cart parking, etc.

### Council Comments

- *Upon inquiry by Council Member Dunagan, it was noted the CVB would operate this space with a contractual agreement for some aspects of the park.*

### **Sports Alliance**

Tourism Director Robyn Lynch shared details regarding championship events to be hosted in 2024-2026.

Ms. Lynch stated The Coop is important to the city because of its economic impact (estimated \$3.7 million). A Northlake Recreation Center would provide an economic impact of \$4.4 million.

**RECESS: 11:13 AM**

**RECONVENE: 11:31 AM**

## **WATER RESOURCES**

A powerpoint presentation displayed photographs of projects in progress. Water Resources Deputy Director Myron Bennett discussed the Flat Creek Water Reclamation Facility Rebuild Project using drone videos to supplement the presentation. There was a conversation about sludge noting the city pays a vendor to take the sludge cake that is repurposed and sold for beneficial reuse. There was a brief discussion about the Gainesville 85 Business Park (G85BP) with a drone video displaying progress. He also discussed a drone video of James Simpson Boulevard and the projects underway in this area.

Asset Program Manager Chris Hamilton discussed the newest sewer lift station noting it is monitored remotely via Supervisory Control And Data Acquisition (SCADA). He stated there were 17 sewer lift stations in the 1990's compared to 73 today with 13 future stations.

Engineering and Construction Services Manager Tracy Robar shared information about water tanks noting there are seven above ground tanks and three active booster pump stations plus one on the way. She discussed the anatomy of a tank before showing a video regarding the basics of how water towers work. There was discussion about the climb team followed by a video of the team working atop a tower.

### **Business Update**

Water Resources Director Linda MacGregor provided a litigation update which addressed the Water Control Manual and Return Flow Credits.

Finance and Administration Division Manager Amy Bennett presented the financial update showing a decrease in the number of meters sold annually to the normal level after peaking for the past two years. Operating revenue continues to increase. As a bit of trivia, it was noted that industries represent less than 1% of the water customers, use 33% of the water demand and pay \$31 million in water/sewer charges each year. There was discussion about water usage currently being the same as in 2006 which is credited to conservation efforts.

There was discussion about market forces (construction index, solids handling, electric power, and chemicals) to identify their impact on expenses. These items are being monitored and have increased by \$3.1 million dollars representing 7% of operating expenses. Retail water rate increases are set at 1.9% noting other utilities are budgeting a 5% increases.

Mrs. Robar discussed capital project funding indicating the FY2025 budget includes \$25 million for new capital projects using available cash. Financial modeling shows the department will continue to generate cash for regular projects. Big projects are anticipated in the future that will need funding sources.

### **What's Coming Up**

The next loan is expected to be for continuing Flat Creek Water Reclamation Facility rebuild projects. The Lead Service Line Inventory is underway using a \$200,000 GEFA grant for a Pilot Project that identifies pipe material. The department is working on communication tools. The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District mandated adopting modifications to the Plumbing Code. This will be presented later in the year via ordinance. Lastly, staff is working to update intergovernmental agreements with Hall County.

**RECESS: 12:46 PM**  
**RECONVENE: 1:00 PM**

### **Northlake Plaza**

City Manager Bryan Lackey shared information about improvement options for this area.

### Council Comments

- *There was consensus for staff to start working with the attorneys to move forward.*

### **Athens Street**

City Manager Bryan Lackey commented on discussion with SA Recycling which originated when Waste Eliminator approached the city about a land swap. Staff pursued this from a corridor cleanup approach. The property in question was displayed. There was discussion about the logistics and possibilities which led to needing direction on how to proceed.

Council Comments

- *Council Member Brooks commented on annexing property along Highway 129 obligates the city to provide services.*
- *Mayor Couvillon and Council Members Hayes, Dunagan and Thompson were good with placing a fire station on Monroe Drive.*

**Trail**

Community and Economic Development Director Rusty Ligon spoke about the east/west spur noting there were encroachments to resolve. A design RFP was to be distributed later this year with hopes of construction in late 2025. The trail ends at SA Recycling (Blaze).

Staff met with SA Recycling. They seem open to working with the City and prefer to work directly with the City instead of through a third party. There's still more work to be done but hopeful the conversation brought new life to the project.

Council Comments

- *Council Member Thompson stated Blaze is not using the finger portion of the property (MacDonald at Elm) and asked if there was a city use. Council Member Brooks stated the topography is problematic.*
- *There was consensus to sell 73 acres.*

**Lakeshore Mall**

City Manager Bryan Lackey commented on the Gainesville Leadership Academy for presenting an idea to improve the mall area. There was discussion about options for the public component.

Community and Economic Development Director Rusty Ligon explained this concept transitions a 40-acre tract of property to 555 multi-family units with structured parking and surface parking. This project is in the early planning stages. Considering potential changes in conjunction with the 2025 election, there was a desire to have a detailed design and all permitting completed by the end of 2025. The three big steps are zoning, DRI and the tax allocation district ordinance. The funding component will be a big ask. GEFA loans are hard to secure. Green infrastructure would be encouraged to minimize cost. Staff will push for destination use for an A+ project.

Council Comments

- *Council Member Brooks suggested an observation deck as a public component.*
- *Council Member Hayes suggested adding a theater and public art components.*
- *Council Member Dunagan suggested less residential and more retail.*
- *Mayor Couvillon felt everything was on the table for the mall.*
- *Mayor Couvillon asked about the saturation for the apartments.*

**Downtown Square Redesign**

Assistant City Manager Angela Sheppard summarized the history of this project noting the original concepts were presented to stakeholders in 2021. She commented on the recent public input meeting containing five interactive stations. The consultant, TSW, captured responses from the 44 people that sign in on the following questions:

- What do you want to see?
- What do you need?
- Who do you want to see?

- Mapping the square – where people linger, how people flow, unused areas and where people/cars interact

The biggest concerns about the square include safety, homelessness, vacant storefronts and Old Joe. TSW is in the process of surveying and continuing the schematic design. They need direction as to how the feedback will be distributed. They also asked if there's interest in testing road closures and how to handle the center of the square.

City Manager Bryan Lackey stated there is an aggressive schedule to have construction drawings by the end of the year. He requested guidance regarding Old Joe.

#### Council Comments

- *There were several suggestions on how to address Old Joe.*
- *There was consensus for one layout.*
- *Council Member Dunagan felt it was appropriate to close roads for special events.*
- *Mayor Couvillon suggested closing two sides of the square, i.e., Bradford and Main.*
- *There was consensus to leave Bradford and Main closed for the weekend after the First Friday event as a test period.*
- *Mayor Couvillon reported business owners requested placing handicap parking on Bradford instead of in the parking deck.*

**RECESS: 3:03 PM**

**RECONVENE: 4:05 PM**

#### MAYOR/COUNCIL OPEN CONVERSATION

- *Mayor Couvillon inquired about the fire truck at INK.*
- *Council Member Dunagan inquired about renaming this meeting to a "workshop".*
- *Council Member Thompson asked if the hospital could participate in safety services. He recalled discussion about a fire fee for nonprofits and commented on needing help to address the building height. Mayor Couvillon asked if Dahlonega, Lumpkin or Braselton have something in place that could help.*

#### FINANCIAL

Chief Financial Officer Jeremy Perry asked for a non-rollback tax increase. The last increase was in 2017 and it has been seven years since the last full rollback. Most revenues are steady except LOST. He estimated the increase per property owner and presented the budget approval process as follows: May 16 City Manager's presentation, June 4 budget presentation and public hearing followed by June 18 budget adoption.

There was a brief discussion about the City respectfully declining to provide a letter of support for House Bill 349 due to concerns about the rollback option or lack thereof.

#### ADJOURNMENT: 4:31 PM

City Clerk Denise Jordan posted signage adjourning the retreat thus canceling the Saturday session.

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W. Samuel Couvillon, Mayor

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Denise O. Jordan, City Clerk